Pest Update (February 15-29, 2012)

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Note: samples containing living tissue may only be accepted from South Dakota. Please do not send samples of dying plants or insects from other states. If you live outside of South Dakota and have a question, instead please send a digital picture of the pest or problem. **Walnut samples may not be sent in from any location – please provide a picture!**

Available on the net at:
http://sdda.sd.gov/Forestry/Educational-Information/PestAlert-Archives.aspx

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Current information

Spring is just around the corner despite the cold and snowy weather much of the state is (finally) experiencing during the past week. Unfortunately the freezing rain and ice are loading branches to the breaking point. I received this picture of a silver maple

dipping sap. During late winter when the days are above freezing and the night below freezing maples will begin moving sap. This is not a common occurrence among tree species, only a few can do this, most notably maples and birches. These trees can develop high stem and root pressure that can force sap out of wounds. The sap of maples, particularly sugar maple, can be very sweet, often more than 3 percent sugar, while birches are much lower, about 1 percent. Considering the number of ice damaged silver maples in eastern South Dakota this week I suspect we will be receiving lots of calls about dripping maples once the weather warms a little more. The sap flow is not harmful to the tree and there is little that can be done to prevent it in any case. Do not place tar, paint or other sealers over the "bleeding" wounds as these materials can be much more harmful to the tree than a little sap loss.

What is causing this sawdust in our firewood? I had this question from two offices this week and it is a question that often comes up in late winter.

There are a lot of insects that make their home in dead or dying trees and when these trees are harvested for firewood they will continue their development in this new home. Some insect will even attack recently felled trees. Typically it is the larval, the immature stage, that is burrowing through the tree when it is cut and split and surprisingly many species can exist and even thrive in a piece of drying split wood. They continue feeding for a few weeks or months, and occasionally years, but eventually form a pupa, the resting stage, and then emerge as adults.

The first time most people are aware their firewood is infested is when they notice small piles of sawdust around and beneath the stack of wood. This sawdust, usually a mix of insect poop (called frass) and wood, is created by the larvae as they feed and tunnel through the wood. If the wood is stored in the house you can sometimes even hear the chew sound of the insects. The other time people notice someone is in their firewood is when the adult insect emerge. If firewood is brought into the warm house during the winter – even stacked in the cellar or basement – the larvae may complete its development, pupate and emerge as an adult in the house.

The most common insect to infested trees harvested for firewood, particularly pines in the western part of the state, are the long-horned beetles, with some referred to as sawyer beetles. The light colored, grub-like larvae are often more than an inch long at maturity and can be as thick as a pencil. The adults are usually about an inch long, black or mottled gray and an antennae (at least for the males) that is as long as the body.

Occasionally, mostly with hardwoods, smaller metallic or flat-headed borers can be found in the wood. The larvae of this borer are much more slender than the long-horned beetle but also white and legless. The adults are usually less than an inch long, very slender and many have a bronze coppery metallic color. There are also many other insects that can be found infesting firewood as well as their predators and parasites, some that appear almost wasp-like.

The biggest concern is whether these adult insects will now attack wood inside the house, furniture, flooring and studs. While we do have problems with power post beetles (see picture to the left). These are generally the result of using wood, studs and flooring, which are already infested with these beetles. Fortunately, with only a few exceptions, insects emerging from firewood will not find a home in kiln-dried wood and are just a nuisance buzzing around the house. They will not attack people or pet. The firewood should not be sprayed as the insects are already inside and the pesticide will not harm the adults as they emerge. Also you should not be burning pesticide-sprayed wood in the home fireplace. Since there are a few insects that can become problems in the home, it is always best to have the insects identified.

The only real concern is stacking firewood made from dying trees near other healthy trees of the same species. Mountain pine beetle, pine engraver beetle, two lined chestnut borer and bronze birch borer are four good examples of insects that can survive in firewood for a season and emerge to attack nearby standing trees. Firewood should be placed in an open, sunny area so it will dry rapidly; creating an environment that is not favorable for larval development, and stored off the ground to keep the wood from gaining moisture.

Finally remember that the primary movement of the emerald ash borer is through firewood being carried from one location to another. Now-a-days it is a good idea to buy your firewood at the campground when you go camping, rather than bring some along. You never know what may be hitchhiking in the firewood you bring!

E-sample

A picture was sent in regarding the possible injury to ice and snow loaded evergreens. There are a number of bend small spruce and pines in the state after this most recent storm. Unless the branches are extremely bent, it is best to leave the snow and ice to melt on its own, branches can bend more than you think.

Attempting to knock or pull the snow and ice away from the branches may result in more injury and breakage.

Samples received

Charles Mix County **We have this Scotch pine that is turning yellow, the pine tree next to it is also turning yellow. What might be the problem?**

It may be nothing. Many Scotch pine have their needles turn yellow during the winter. This has long been a frustrating fact to Christmas tree growers who have to spray their Scotch pines with colorant to have green trees for the holidays. The sample that came in was otherwise healthy, the needles were succulent as well as the twig, and the only problem was the off-color needles. Unless there are other problems associated with the trees, i.e. dead needles on part of the tree or branches or dead branches, I suspect the foliage will turn its normal bluish-green again this spring.